FACT SHEET - The Status of Back Bay Canada Geese, August 2005

- Back Bay historically wintered large numbers of Canada geese, with between 3,000-5,000 geese counted on annual surveys from the 1950's through the early 1970's, and over 15,000 counted in some years. Goose numbers started declining in the late 1970's, and by the mid 1980's, Canada goose numbers were down to an average of only 500 geese per year. Conservative harvest regulations were instituted in the 1980's in response to this decline and the season was eventually closed in 1989.
- Major changes in the landscape and a shift in the migratory patterns of Canada geese in Back Bay and the Atlantic Flyway are the main reasons for this decline. The decline was not limited to Back Bay but was seen throughout the Southeast including the states of North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia.
- Increases in the numbers of Atlantic Population (migrant) Canada geese that have occurred in the Chesapeake and mid-Atlantic areas of the flyway during the past 10 years have not been seen in the Back Bay area or other southern areas.
- At the same time, resident Canada geese have expanded rapidly throughout the Southeast. In Back Bay and the cities of Virginia Beach and Chesapeake, landscape and habitat conditions have changed dramatically, bolstering a steadily increasing resident Canada goose population.
- A hunting season is being proposed on Back Bay (15 days, 1 goose per day) to provide recreational opportunities for Back Bay waterfowlers to take advantage of this resident goose resource. The hunt area would be as currently described in the Federal Register: "The waters of Back Bay and its tributaries and the marshes adjacent thereto, and on the land and marshes between Back Bay and the Atlantic Ocean from Sandbridge to the North Carolina line, and on and along the shores of North Landing River and the marshes adjacent thereto, and on and along the shores of Binson Inlet Lake (formerly known as Lake Tecumseh) and Red Wing Lake and the marshes adjacent thereto".
- The uplands west of Back Bay were re-opened along with the remainder of the state in 1999 when the Atlantic Population hunting season was reopened. This area will remain in the regular Atlantic Population zone with a hunting season framework of 45 days and a 2- bird daily bag limit.
- A limited framework is being offered because a sport harvest has been absent on the waters of Back Bay since 1989. A cautionary approach is needed to allow VDGIF to monitor the size and composition of the harvest. Under a Memorandum of Understanding with the USFWS, VDGIF must collect feather samples of Canada geese harvested during the season for genetic analysis. The season will be held at the end of the Atlantic Population goose season to minimize concerns about geese that might migrate through Virginia to areas further south.